

## Meeting Notes

Los Angeles County Department of Regional Planning

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### Attendees:

Daniel Garcia, Community Rehabilitation Services  
Sandy Chu, Southern California Rehabilitation Services  
Donna Graham, Services Center for Independent Living- Claremont  
Reginald Robinson, Communities Actively Living Independent & Free  
Juan De Las Cagigas, Communities Actively Living Independent & Free  
Joan Wall, LA County Community Development Commission  
Karina Arabolaza, Housing Rights Center  
Gretchen Siemers, LA County Regional Planning Department  
Connie Chung, LA County Regional Planning Department

### Presentation:

Gretchen Siemers welcomed the discussion group participants and introductions were given by everyone. Ms. Siemers presented a slideshow which included background information on the forthcoming Reasonable Accommodations Ordinance. Some major points from the slideshow:

- The Department of Regional Planning regulates land use throughout the unincorporated areas of Los Angeles County.
- Los Angeles County committed to adopting an ordinance to allow persons with disabilities to request exceptions to planning, zoning and building standards in the recently adopted Housing Element of the General Plan.
- Various State and Federal Fair Housing Laws protect persons with disabilities, and those acting on their behalf, from housing discrimination.
- The Reasonable Accommodations Ordinance will provide a clear and streamlined procedure to request exceptions to existing standards; it will not require providers or developers of housing for persons with disabilities to install additional accessibility features.
- Some key components of the ordinance are:
  - The findings required to prove that an accommodation is reasonable and necessary;
  - The designated person who will make the determination on a request;
  - The timeframe for the Department of Regional Planning has to make a determination;

- The appeals procedure;
- Whether or not a public hearing would be required; and
- When would an application fee be necessary.
- Examples of a Reasonable Accommodation from zoning include the encroachment into a required setback in order to build a wheel-chair ramp, the expansion of a group home in order to make that housing type financially viable, and waiving a zoning variance requirement to permit an accessible parking space in a front yard.
- The development of the ordinance includes, among other things, outreach to affected groups and research on fair housing policies of other local jurisdictions. After adoption, Regional Planning staff will publicize the availability of the procedure and train planners in fair housing practices.

#### **Discussion:**

A discussion ensued about many of the issues that were brought up in the slideshow. Major points are highlighted below:

- Group members commented that tenants' issues are important to consider in the development of this ordinance. Staff will consider the ways that a tenant could request a reasonable accommodation to planning or zoning standards to allow fair and equal housing access.
- Accessibility standards in multifamily housing may be not stringent enough. It was commented that landlords can be reluctant to accommodate tenants with disabilities. It is noted however, that the reasonable accommodations ordinance does not change existing accessibility standards in and of itself, but staff will relay the concerns about current standards to planners and building officials responsible for administering those standards. Some examples of accessibility standards that need to be re-evaluated include:
  - Minimum quotas for accessible housing units;
  - Required universal design;
  - Required accessible parking; it was also noted that the City of Los Angeles has a program to mark accessible parking spaces in front of residences when necessary for housing access.
  - Ramps;
  - Emergency access;
  - Elevators;

- It was commented that staff discuss these health and safety issues with other responsible agencies, such as the Building and Safety Department at Public Works and the Fire Department.
- Under fair housing law, charging a fee may be considered a “refusal” to grant a reasonable accommodation. Also, it was noted that, in the definition of disability, “a physical or mental impairment” includes medical conditions.
- The verification of a person’s disability and the necessity of the accommodation in relation to a disability may be a component of the ordinance. Fair housing laws say that a letter from a doctor or caregiver with a testament to the person’s case, would be sufficient verification. Also, a person’s perceived disability is also covered under fair housing protections.
- It was suggested that the Department of Regional Planning designate a specific staff person to handle all of the requests. The Department could possibly partner with the Housing Rights Center to educate staff on how to treat reasonable accommodation requests.
- The importance of a clear-cut appeal procedure was noted.

#### **Next Steps**

- Staff will be preparing a webpage with outreach materials and other resources, the link to be delivered soon.
- We will also be contacting apartment and landlord associations to involve them in the discussion of reasonable accommodations as well, because tenant requests may be likely.
- A next meeting will be scheduled via email; it would be preferable to have the next meeting in a more accessible way, perhaps via teleconference.